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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the English language acquisition of three native Spanish-speaking children in a bilingual preschool, focusing on the spontaneous use of English when play-acting at being superhero figures from popular children's culture. The occurrence of this voice is contrasted with the children's use of Spanish for other types of play and for "asides" (stage directions) during the play-acting episodes. The power of this play to promote English is suggested by the children's comments. Factors in the home, school, and larger social context that appeared to promote the dichotomization of the children's voices into English speaking "self" and Spanish-speaking "other" are discussed, and implications for second language acquisition and bilingual development are considered. A 23-item bibliography is included. (MSE)

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Appropriating the Voice of the Superheroes: Three Pre-Schoolers' English Language Acquisition

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Appropriating the Voice of the Superheroes: Three Pre-Schoolers' English Language Acquisition

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Results from a qualitative investigation of the English language acquisition of three Spanish-speaking children enrolled in a bilingual pre-school are reported, focusing on the children's spontaneous use of English when play-acting at being figures from popular children's culture. The occurrence of this voice is contrasted with the children's use of Spanish for other types of play, and for "asides" (stage directions) during the play-acting episodes; its power to promote English is suggested by the children's comments. Factors in the home, school, and larger social context which appeared to promote the dichotomization of the children's voices into the English speaking "self" and the Spanish speaking "other" are discussed, and implications for second language acquisition and bilingual development are considered.

Appropriating the Voice of the Superheroes: Three Pre-Schoolers' English Language Acquisition

Introduction

In the first half of this century, studies of bilingual children gave little attention given to the socio-cultural context of language development. Empirical work typically focused on case studies of individual children, in situations where their two languages were viewed with high prestige, as in Europe. Bilingualism was addressed strictly as a cognitive phenomenon, and only in passing were such concerns as language choice and the influence of differential contexts of the two languages mentioned. It was noted that the children used the languages appropriately with different speakers (Leopold, 1947), and that when addressed in the "unexpected" language by a given speaker, the children would often refuse to answer, a finding that was interpreted as "pretend(ing) not to understand" (Metraux, 1965, in McLaughlin, 1978).

In the 1960's, sociolinguists began to take into account extralinguistic elements and the social environment of the speech act as factors that "delimit the range and condition the selection of message forms" (Basso, 1970, p. 68). Bilingual and bi-dialectical children were shown to use their oral codes in purposeful and principled manners, with topical and situational (such as home/school and public/private) specificity of languages noted (Ruke-Dravina, 1967, in McLaughlin, 1978; Zentella, 1981), a tendency to prefer one form for one meaning (Ervin-Tripp, 1973), and a preference by young children raised in a bilingual environment to use the language of the dominant culture with their siblings and with their peers, while reserving the home language for use with their parents (Padilla & Liebman, 1975).

These sociolinguistic analyses paved the way for work on the inter-relationship between sociological factors and cognitive/linguistic development, with particular social environments promoting particular kinds of linguistic competence. Lambert (1977) made the distinction between "additive" and "subtractive" bilingualism, with additive bilingualism only possible when children live in conditions that allow for the full development of their home language, and subtractive bilingualism more likely to develop in situations where the home language is not valued within the

larger culture. Children in the latter setting, it was argued, may gain a new language at the expense of their home language, culture, and self-esteem. Furthermore, the cognitive benefits of bilingualism that have been demonstrated, such as increased verbal skills (Kessler and Quinn, 1980) and advanced metalinguistic functioning (Duncan and DeAvila, 1979), are postulated only to derive from additive bilingualism. When children begin to acquire the language of the dominant culture before they have a solid grounding in their home language, subtractive bilingualism is more likely to occur.

In examining bilingual development, then, it is important to consider the contexts in which the children are exposed to each language, as well as the value that is placed on the languages in each setting. Mere exposure to a language does not assure that the language will be acquired. Edelsky and Hudelson (1980), for example, found that the English speaking students in a bilingual classroom, who were outnumbered 3:1 by Spanish speaking students, and whose teacher used both Spanish and English for instruction, learned very little Spanish over the course of the school year, while the Spanish speaking students learned a great deal of English.

Verhoeven (1991), in attempting to develop a prediction model for first and second language skills among young ethnic/linguistic minority children (Turkish children in the Netherlands), focused on child, family, and institutional characteristics and their relationships to the children's pragmatic and grammatical proficiency in both their first and second languages. Advanced pragmatic first language skills were significantly correlated with the children's orientation toward Turkish cultural life, contact with Turkish speaking peers, and parental involvement at their pre-schools. Advanced grammatical first language skills were significantly related to the children's orientation toward the Turkish way of life, their parents' cultural behavior, and the extent of their interaction with caretakers in Turkish. High levels of pragmatic skills in Dutch were significantly related to the children's orientation toward Dutch life, the degree of family interaction in Dutch, and the degree of caretaker interaction in Dutch. A larger number of factors were highly correlated with advanced grammatical skills in Dutch, including the children's general cognitive capacity, parental attitudes, the amount of the family's use of Dutch, the cultural behavior of the parents, and the amount of peer interaction in Dutch. While Verhoeven correctly cautions about interpreting this correlational data, as well as about the dangers of generalizing from these

Turkish/Dutch children to other social/linguistic contexts, his work underscores the importance of examining the impact of institutional variables on the language development of young bilingual children, along with familial and individual characteristics.

As children enter formal institutions at younger ages, through child-care and pre-schools, this concern becomes more critical. Young children readily acquire new languages, but the new languages may just as readily replace their first languages, resulting in subtractive bilingualism. Work by García (1983) demonstrates that pre-school children who had equal exposure to Spanish and English at home tended to be more advanced in English, even when enrolled in a bilingual, bi-cultural pre-school. A survey of over 1100 bilingual families from throughout the United States (Wong-Fillmore, in progress) seems to document this phenomenon on a large scale: bilingual children enrolled in pre-schools (even bilingual, bi-cultural pre-schools), through early exposure to English, tend to stop using - and therefore to stop developing - their home language, even when that is the only language spoken by their parents. This has important implications not only for the bilingual and cognitive development of those individuals, but also for intra-familial communication. Yet very little work has been done to illuminate more precisely the processes by which English may come to displace the home language, or the ways in which the dominance of English may be reflected in young children's language acquisition, and few case studies of children in a bilingual, bicultural context have been done within the sociolinguistic framework. Similarly, there has been little attention to the ways in which the degree and kind of bilingualism that children attain may vary across time and across settings.

This study attempted to examine a small piece of this complex phenomenon, by analyzing how three Spanish dominant bilingual pre-schoolers use English with each other for spontaneous play within a bilingual, bi-cultural context. The study focused on the topics and the situations for which English was chosen for use by these children, in order to illuminate the processes by which English may come to dominate in certain contexts, if not in all.

The specific research questions that were addressed were:

-In what situations do these children use English for oral communication?

-In relation to what topics is English selected?

-What factors in the home life and the pre-school curriculum seem to affect the choice of language for different activities?

The Children

The focus of this study was on three children: Carlos, Veronica, and Elena. When formal observations were initiated, Carlos was 3 years, 8 months, Veronica was 3 years, 3 months, and Elena was 2 years, 10 months; all had been enrolled at the school for at least six months. These children were selected for study because all three are being raised in bilingual home environments, where one parent is a native speaker of English, and one a native speaker of Spanish; yet the parents of all three chose to emphasize Spanish with their children, and all three children spoke virtually no English before enrolling in the pre-school. One of the children is the child of this investigator.

The Pre-school

The daycare/pre-school, located in the heart of a large Southwestern city, is itself a bilingual setting. The four principal caregivers are native Spanish speakers. The director is a native English speaker with minimal competency in Spanish. Eight of the twenty-eight children enrolled at the start of the study were from homes where only Spanish is spoken; thirteen were from homes where only English is spoken; five (including the three informants) were from homes where both are used; and two children were from homes where other languages are used.

The parents of all three children said they were attracted to the school because of its historical tradition as a "progressive" daycare center, where ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity is valued, and where their children's use of Spanish would be encouraged. Under the bilingual model in place at the start of this study the teachers used Spanish and English concurrently in group sessions, and the language of each child in individual interactions. However, this model was modified after the study began, as described in the section on "Language Uses at the Pre-school."

Data Collection

Observations

The three children were observed interacting with each other and with their peers at the pre-school for approximately one and one-half hour on each of twelve different occasions during the

morning "Free Play" (when the children choose from a variety of materials and outdoor equipment) , and on eight occasions during Group Time. Field notes were recorded during or shortly after each of these sessions.

The children were also observed interacting together outside of the pre-school, at the homes of two of the informants. Thirteen observations of 1-3 hours each were made with at least two of the three children present. One of the three child informants was observed outside of the preschool slightly less often than the other two. Field notes were taken, and on five occasions audiotapes were made and transcribed. The total time spent observing the children playing together over the three month period was approximately 50 hours.

Interviews

Formal semi-structured interviews were conducted with the parents of the children. The interviews sought to establish patterns of language use in the homes, as well as to document the parents' assessment of the situations and topics for which they have observed their children use English. Written notes were taken during each interview. Informal interviews were also conducted with the teachers at the pre-school regarding the informants' use of English at school, as well as the language use of the adults and other children under the bilingual policy.

Data Analysis

The data from the field notes and transcriptions were coded to designate three types of interactions between the children during free, spontaneous play: play-acting at being a person other than themselves, regular play with toys or manipulatives (in which the children were not pretending to be anyone other than themselves), and conversation embedded within the play. (This conversation usually appeared as "asides," spoken as stage directions from one child to another in the middle of a play episode.) A further distinction was made between the children's play-acting at being a character from popular children's culture and their play-acting at being other real or imagined characters. These coding categories emerged from the field notes as a means of capturing all of the children's interactions with each other; they were not predetermined categories. A count was made of each of these interactions. For example, if the children were playing "school," then began building with building blocks, and then used dolls for play-acting, this was coded as play-acting, regular play, and popular culture/ play-acting respectively, and counted as three distinct

play episodes. If the children were play-acting, then used the building blocks, and then returned to the play-acting, this was coded as play-acting, regular play, and play-acting, and also counted as three episodes. Finally, the language used by the children for each of these interactions was coded, and a count was made of the children's choice of English or Spanish within and across each episode of play. Patterns were then sought that distinguished the children's use of the two languages. The interview data and observations at the school were also coded in order to illuminate the elements in the home and school settings that may have contributed to the children's language choice.

In order to ensure respondent validity, a draft and the final version of this report were shared with the parents of the three children, who were encouraged to note any discrepancies they might have with the analysis of the data. None were noted.

FINDINGS

Language Uses at Home: The Home Language Context

Carlos: Carlos' mother, a native Spanish speaker, never uses English with Carlos, nor with Carlos' eighteen-month old brother, although she does speak the language fluently, and uses it with her husband "when he doesn't understand" her Spanish. Carlos' father does not feel entirely fluent in Spanish, but he feels it is important to reinforce Spanish at home, and he uses it with the children most of the time. (He sometimes uses English with the children when they are in the presence of non-Spanish speakers, but he doesn't like to do so because "it disrupts things; they get the idea that they can speak English at home.") He acknowledged that "it takes a lot of effort to always speak Spanish at home," especially when he is tired; but he is committed to it because he wants his children to be "capable of being completely bilingual at a higher level;" and he feels that this will not be possible unless Spanish is insisted upon at home.

Carlos' other regular caretakers (a full-time in-home caretaker for the first two years, a part-time in-home caretaker now, for the two days he does not attend the pre-school, and his maternal grandmother for occasional care) all speak Spanish at all times. Carlos' paternal grandmother and an aunt live at some distance; they speak only English in phone calls and on infrequent visits.

Carlos "automatically" uses Spanish with these relatives, on the phone or in person. When these relatives send postcards, Carlos' father translates them for Carlos into Spanish.

Carlos' mother says Carlos "demands to be read to every day." She always reads to him in Spanish, even if a book is in English, in which case she translates. She added that the translation can get tiring, "especially if the book is long," and that Carlos sometimes gets impatient. She also noted that it's difficult to find books in Spanish. Carlos' father also usually translates the books into Spanish, or else makes up stories in Spanish to go with the pictures. He saw this as problematic, however, as Carlos gets different versions of the same book from different people and in different readings, and so may not make the connection from the spoken word to the print. When his father reads a book that is in Spanish, he will point to the words. (He added that he used to point when reading or translating, but "at some point you have to be honest.") Carlos talks with his parents about the books in Spanish, and his parents have seen him pick up a book to read to himself; this they observed in both Spanish and English.

Carlos' mother worries that the television is on too much at home, and always in English. The family does have a cable hook-up by which they can access some programs that are simulcast in Spanish, but they tend not to use it, as few programs actually have the service. Carlos' father notes Carlos' interest in "superhero" characters such as Spiderman, Superman, and the Ninja Turtles; he tried to find superhero videotapes in Spanish (while Carlos "rides out this interest"), but he couldn't find any. He lamented that "everything Carlos admires" in popular culture is in English, and that "just like they come home with colds, they're gonna' come home with that garbage."

Carlos' parents both emphasized that Carlos spoke no English before he began attending the pre-school at 2 1/2 years old, but that he acquired it very quickly after that. They feel Carlos' Spanish is still more developed than his English, but that his English is quickly catching up. When Carlos mixes the languages in a single utterance, his father will correct him, saying, for example: "Es rojo, no es 'red.'" They never worried about Carlos learning English, but they are concerned that he could resist developing Spanish, and so they are committed to reinforcing Spanish as much as possible.

Veronica's mother, a native English speaker, now uses only English with Veronica, with a few "buzz words" thrown in, such as "pacha" (*bottle*), and "colcha" (*blanket*). However, for the first two years, she spoke mostly Spanish, "because I wanted her to have Spanish, and it seemed that was what she understood best." (Veronica had been cared for on most days by her paternal grandmother, who speaks only Spanish.) Veronica's mother explained that she did not feel very comfortable speaking Spanish with her daughter, as she was limited by her ability in the language, and so when Veronica started at the pre-school, and began picking up English, her mother switched into English.

Veronica's father speaks Spanish at all times at home "porque me siento mejor" (*"because it feels better"*). Veronica's mother may converse with him in English, but he answers in Spanish most of the time. He "insists" that Veronica speak to him in Spanish. If she slips into English "le hago entender que yo no entiendo." (*"I let her know that I don't understand"*). Veronica's maternal relatives speak only English; Veronica sees them infrequently. Her paternal grandmother visits with her regularly.

When asked if they read to Veronica, both parents said they read in English (although her father will talk about the books in Spanish). They said they had very few books in Spanish, and that all Veronica's favorites, such as "The Berenstein Bears," are in English. Before Veronica was two, they would translate the books into Spanish, but now Veronica doesn't like that, and insists on English. Veronica's grandmother sometimes reads to her in Spanish (by taking an English book and talking about the pictures or making up a story), but Veronica doesn't seem to like it, saying"she (her grandmother) doesn't know English." They have observed Veronica reading to herself, "usually in English," but occasionally in Spanish.

Veronica's mother also worries that Veronica watches too much television; her favorite program is "The Flintstones," which she watches each morning before school. In the evenings she often watches children's movies, such as "Peter Pan" and "the Little Mermaid." She sometimes spends Saturdays or evenings at her paternal grandmother's, where the television is continuously on, and where Veronica watches "novelas" (Spanish soap operas) with her grandmother.

Veronica's parents feel her ability in both languages is very good, and that she demonstrates much flexibility and dexterity with the two languages. Her mother thought that she

may be leveling off in Spanish as she increases in English, and that she used more sophisticated vocabulary and grammatical constructions in English, but her father considered her Spanish to be very good, and progressing.

Elena

Elena's parents use mostly English among themselves, but both spoke only Spanish with Elena until she was two years, six months old. At that time, Elena started at the pre-school, and began picking up English. She also visited and was visited by her English speaking relatives. Her mother then chose to use English with her when English speakers were present, but Spanish at all other times. On the two days each week that Elena does not attend the pre-school, she is at home with her mother; for her first two years she was at home two days each week with her father. Elena's father speaks only Spanish with her at all times, and her other part-time caretakers have been Spanish speakers. Elena's paternal grandmother, who speaks only Spanish, recently moved to the area and visits regularly with the child.

Both parents read to Elena in Spanish, and make an effort to secure a variety of children's books in Spanish. Her mother also read to her in English (although when Elena was younger she would translate them); her father usually translates English books into Spanish, although sometimes Elena insists on having them read in English.

Elena's television viewing is restricted to public television, which is only available in English. Her parents also occasionally rent movies for her; until recently they selected them ("mostly children's music videos, that only seem to exist in English"), but now Elena has begun to insist on making her own selections from children's popular culture. She has viewed "The Little Mermaid," "Peter Pan," "Cinderella," and "The Wizard of Oz" - all in English. She never watches television in Spanish. Elena's father expressed concern that Latino children growing up in this country have little access to Latin American culture, and may grow up thinking that the Spanish "novelas" (*"soap operas"*) on television are all the culture has to offer.

Both parents consider Elena's Spanish to be very good, and clearly more advanced than her English. They felt that she generally prefers to speak Spanish, and while she is outgoing and expressive around Spanish speakers, she tended to shy away from situations in which she would have to speak English. They noted, for example, her reluctance to talk to her maternal

grandmother on the phone, or her tendency to cling to her parents when English speakers were present. They felt that she had never seemed interested in speaking English (despite the fact that she heard her parents speak it among themselves) until she started at the pre-school. Now, however, they see English intruding more and more on her Spanish with an increasing number of English words embedded in Spanish sentences. When Elena mixes languages in a single utterance, her parents usually either rephrase it for her in Spanish, or ask her to rephrase it. When they ask her to rephrase it, she usually complies without hesitation.

Language Uses at School: The School Language Context

A new bilingual policy was recently developed by a group of parents involved in the curriculum committee at the pre-school. The thrust of the new plan was for the teachers to separate their use of the two languages, to use each in a natural context, and to emphasize the minority language (Spanish). The plan called for the time designated as "Group Time" (when the children gather in a circle for activities) each day to be done in equal amounts of Spanish and English, but not concurrently; a story would be read each day in Spanish in the morning, and in English in the afternoon; more Spanish songs and activities would be developed; and Spanish only would be used at snack times and clean-up times. The teachers would continue to use the language of each particular child in individual interactions. All of the parents agreed to the plan, which was discussed at an open meeting. The teachers also agreed with the new plan, but wanted to modify it "slightly." Under the teachers' modified plan English only would be used during Group Time one day each week; Spanish only on one day; and concurrent translation (as was done previously on all days) on the other three. The teachers did not define which days would be done in English and which in Spanish, as that would depend on what they were able to prepare. The teachers felt that the original plan would involve too much preparation, as they did not have enough materials, songs, or activities in Spanish. The modified plan was put into effect about one month after this study was begun.

The teachers seemed to feel that their modified plan was consistent with the original plan developed by the curriculum committee, which they endorsed, although they worried that the children would be confused without concurrent translation. One teacher reflected on her own

experience as a young immigrant from Mexico, in a classroom where she did not understand what was being said, and where she was punished for speaking Spanish on the playground.

All but one of the group sessions observed for this study was done using either concurrent translation or all English. In the concurrent sessions, English was always spoken first, by the main teacher. The same teacher, or another, would then translate her comments into Spanish. Often, many things went untranslated. [In one session, the head teacher led a discussion entirely in English, except for brief questions directed to the Spanish-speaking children in Spanish. She then led the children in three English songs, with no translation. I asked another teacher if this was the "English day." She said, "Oh, no, es de los dos." (*"Oh, no, it's the day of both."*)] Most of the songs that were selected were English songs from records (which were sometimes, but not always, translated into Spanish by the teachers); several parents had donated tapes of Spanish songs, and the teachers said they had a tape recorder, but it was never used during the observation sessions.

On one other occasion, Spanish only was used. The Spanish session was announced by the teachers to the children as the first day of the new policy. The head teacher explained to the children, in English, that they would be using only Spanish for that session. She initiated the discussion with her expectation that all of the children should try to use Spanish: "I don't want to hear 'I don't want to try.' I don't think we're going to accept that. It's wonderful to speak two languages. Or three or four or five. So today is going to be the day of Spanish." She concluded with a discussion of the benefits of speaking two languages, giving examples from the children's own lives. The teachers then taught the children a new Spanish song, "Pimpon," about a paper doll, and then helped the children to make their own paper dolls. The children seemed to enjoy the activity and continued to sing "Pimpon" over the next few days. The only other Spanish song I ever heard being sung was "De Colores."

On another day, the teachers led the children in several English songs, and then in the Spanish song "De Colores." At that point, several of the English speaking boys seemed restless and started making faces. The teachers stopped the song and talked to the boys, telling them: "It makes me really angry when you do that. We need to respect the Spanish language. We speak two languages here. I don't like it when you don't respect Spanish.

In the group sessions I observed, the most active and vocal participants were the English speakers. The teachers noted the same phenomenon, although they believed that Elena, Carlos and Veronica participated actively in Spanish. They commented that many of the Spanish speaking children seemed to be "quite shy."

On the other hand, when the children were outside in the play area during Free Play time, there seemed to be a happy mix of languages, with the Spanish speaking children as vocal as the English speakers. There was time for outdoor play in the morning and in the afternoon each day, and the children chose between sand play, play on swings, on a jungle gym, in a play house, with trucks, with blocks, or with special activities such as painting, bubble-making, or playdough. During the observation sessions, Carlos seemed to prefer to play in the sand, with the trucks, or in the play house; he engaged mostly with the older, English speaking boys, or else with Carlos and Elena. Veronica seemed to move freely from one activity to another, playing by herself, or interacting briefly with different groups of children. Elena seemed to prefer to be on the swings or to engage in the special activities, and spent more of her time with the Spanish speaking girls, or with Veronica and Carlos. All three spoke mostly Spanish on the yard, except in their interactions with the English speaking children, and in episodes of play-acting. The other Spanish speaking children were occasionally heard using English; the English speaking children were never heard using Spanish.

Both English books and Spanish books were available for the children to peruse on the shelves in each of the three rooms in the center; however, there were five times as many books in English as in Spanish, despite recent gifts of Spanish books to the center. In addition, the teachers had a collection of books that were kept in the office and used to read aloud to the children. All but five of these were in English. The teachers agreed that they do not have enough Spanish books to read aloud, and that they end up reading the same ones over and over. It was not clear whether a Spanish book was in fact read at some point in each day; in the observation sessions only English ones were read.

The walls in one of the three rooms in the center had posters and charts in both English and Spanish, but twice as many were in English as in Spanish, and most of the Spanish ones were hand-lettered. The walls in the other two rooms had posters that were all in English. In each of

the three rooms, there was a chart of the English alphabet, with correlated pictures, and a chart of the alphabet in American Sign Language. Students' work (with names but no print) was also displayed prominently on the walls in each room and in the halls.

Occasionally (as on rainy days), the teachers have opted to show videos to the children. Those videos that have been shown include a music video by the children's musician, "Raffi; Disney's popular children's video, "The Little Mermaid," and "Hug-a-Bunch." All the videos that have been shown have been in English. The children also went on a field trip to see the play "Peter Pan," and another one to see the show "Disney on Ice."

THE CHILDREN'S USE OF ENGLISH

The Voice of "the Other"

Elena and Carlos were playing at Elena's house, pretending to cook for each other, and to give each other medicine. In these play episodes they used their own voices in Spanish. Then Carlos changed the game:

Carlos: (with a play-acting voice): "I'm Peter Pan! I'm flying!" (Turning to Elena, using his normal voice): "Ahora tú vas a dormir y Peter Pan se va a esconder." (*"Now you go to sleep and Peter Pan is going to hide."*) (Again, using the play-acting voice): "I'm Peter Pan! Look! There are sharks!" (Again, dropping the play voice and turning to instruct Elena on the game): "Cierra tus ojos." (*"Close your eyes."*) (With the voice again, as Elena giggled): "Here I am! I'm Peter Pan! I was falling!"

Elena: (using her normal voice): "Ahora tú tienes que dormir y yo soy Peter Pan." (*"Now you have to sleep and I'm Peter Pan."*)

Carlos: (normal voice): "No, porque Peter Pan es un 'boy'" (*"No, because Peter Pan is a boy."*)

Elena: (normal voice): "O.K., tú me dices 'I'm gonna' take you to Never Land.'" (*"O.K., then you say to me 'I'm gonna' take you to Never Land."*)

Carlos: "No, yo vengo en cinço minutos." (*"No, I'll be back in five minutes."*)

Elena: "I'm Wendy. I'm going to take Michael and John. Come, Michael. Come, John." (Singing): "Go to fly, go to fly go to fly!"

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Elena, Carlos, and Veronica were playing with a table that inverts by pushing a button, to reveal flowers underneath.

Elena: "Dónde están las flores? Pongalo en el 'ground.' Aquí se apacha, mira." (*"Where are the flowers? Put it on the ground. This is where you push it, look."*)

Veronica: "Yo voy a ir aquí." (*"I'm going to go over here."*)

Carlos: (Holding a Spiderman doll, and using a play-acting voice): "Look, my hands."

Veronica: (Holding a Minnie Mouse doll, in front of a doll house; using a play-acting voice) "Into my house, I go with my mom. I'm the girl and that's my mom. Let's go on the other side."

Elena: (holding a Barbie doll, and using a play-acting voice): "Let's go over here. I help you, girl. Spiderman, can you find me? You wanna' be my friend, Spiderman?"

Carlos: "Ya."

Veronica: "You wanna' be my friend?"

Elena, meanwhile, had spied a box of "Colorforms" (plastic stick-on shapes). The three moved over to play with it, dropping their play-acting voices, immediately reverting back to Spanish for their interactions.

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Elena and Carlos were playing together at Elena's house. They were talking only in Spanish. Then they started playing with toy people. Immediately, the conversation switched into English, with play-acting voices:

Elena: "Do you wanna' come in the house?"

Carlos: "I don't, Mother" (Note: Carlos calls his own mother "Mami")

Elena: "I'm in the house, it's very hot." (Then, in her normal tone of voice, as if speaking to Carlos rather than to the toy figure he held): "Aquí se sale, verdad? (*"This is where I go out, right?"*) (Then, again with the play voice): I don't have a surprise for you, niños (*"children"*)."

Carlos: "I want a surprise!"

Elena: (still with the play voice) "Yo puedo jugar." (*"I can play."*) (Then, as if correcting her slip into Spanish): "I can play. Come and play."

After about ten minutes, the two stopped playing with the figures, and went back into speaking Spanish with each other about what they wanted to eat. They went to ask for some fruit. About fifteen minutes later, they returned to the dolls, and again used play-acting voices in English:

Elena: "You want to go in?"

Carlos: "Ya."

Elena: "O.K., let's go! Let's dance!"

Carlos: "No."

Elena: "Why don't you want to?" (Then, in her normal voice, to Carlos, to refer to a toy Carlos had picked up): "Así no va, Carlos." (*"It doesn't go like that.*)

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Elena: (playing by herself while Veronica was in the other room): "I'm Peter Pan. My name is Peter Pan." (This was repeated four or five times while "flying" around the room.)

Elena's father: "Elena, ven pa' acá" (*"Elena, come here"*)

Elena: "No, my name is Peter Pan."

Elena's father: "Entonces, Peter Pan, ven pa' acá." (*"Then Peter Pan, come here."*)

Elena: "Ahora yo soy Elena." (*"Now I'm Elena."*)

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This play-acting, English-speaking voice emerged on every occasion that the children were observed outside of the pre-school and on several occasions at the pre-school. The parents, and Carlos' caretaker, also noted the appearance of this voice when their children engaged in solitary play at home. The voice appeared when the children were play-acting at being any real or imagined person other than themselves, when pretending to <u>be</u> the dolls they played with, or when pretending to be a character from popular children's culture. Those characters that were observed include Mickey Mouse, Peter Pan, the Little Mermaid, Superman, Supergirl, Spiderman, the Ninja Turtles, and Barbie. The play-acting was always signalled by a change in the tone and quality of

the children's voices, and was often announced by such statements as "I'm Supergirl!" Veronica was heard to use this voice on seven occasions in English, and one occasion in Spanish; Carlos on fifteen occasions in English and two in Spanish; and Elena on nineteen occasions in English and three in Spanish. (See Table 1.) In one of the occasions when Spanish was chosen, the children were playing a family: Carlos was the father, Veronica the mother, and Elena the baby. In another instance when Spanish was used, Elena was playing the teacher and Carlos the student. The children were never observed using Spanish to act out scenes with characters from popular culture. (The children certainly engaged in imaginative play in Spanish; however, the table indicates those instances in which the children were clearly pretending to be someone else, using a feigned voice, rather than simply incorporating elements of fantasy and imagination into their play.)

- Table 1 about here -

In the midst of such play-acting, the children occasionally made side comments that appeared in the children's regular voices. Veronica made four such comments, Carlos eleven, and Elena fourteen. In all but five instances, these comments were made in Spanish. On all occasions, the episodes of play-acting were preceded and followed by a different type of play, with other toys, in which the children did not pretend to be someone else, and used their own voices, in Spanish.

For Carlos, at least, the choice of language for the popular characters was conscious and purposeful. When asked what language Peter Pan speaks, he answered "English." and his mother reported on the following conversation while Carlos took a bath (originally in Spanish):

Carlos: "Mami, I'm not going to speak Spanish anymore."

Carlos' mother: "Why not?!"

Carlos: "Because I'm getting older, I'm growing up."

Carlos' mother: "But lots of grownups speak Spanish!"

Carlos: "But Batman doesn't speak Spanish. Superman doesn't speak Spanish. Peter Pan doesn't speak Spanish, either."

On another occasion, in an observation session, Carlos overheard Elena's father mention the word "Latino." Carlos exclaimed, "Latinos!" Elena's father explained that he and Carlos and Elena were Latinos, and that they spoke Spanish. Carlos responded, "Pero cuando yo estoy

grande yo solo voy a hablar un idioma." (*"But when I'm grown up I'm only going to speak one language."*) When asked what language that would be, he said, "Solo inglés." (*"Only English"*). When asked why, Carlos answered, "Porque yo voy a ser grande, y solo voy a hablar uno. Porque yo tengo que ser grande, más y más y más y más. Y los Ninja Turtles hablan inglés." (*"Because I'm going to be big, and I'll only talk one. Because I have to be big, more and more and more and more. And the Ninja Turtles talk English."*) He then looked away and seemed disinterested in pursuing the conversation. Elena, who overheard this conversation, added, "Yo también solo voy a hablar uno." (*"I'm also only going to speak one."*)

Discussion

All three of the children are clearly acquiring English. They are also developing a good deal of flexibility and versatility in their manipulation of two languages systems, using both in appropriate and self-conscious manners. Their code-switching is by no means arbitrary; it is patterned and purposeful, and reflects both their internalization of the larger social and linguistic context, as well as their transformation of that context in play. This complex use of a second language has been developed within a relatively short time frame, since none of the children spoke English before enrolling in the pre-school, and all three have been enrolled at the school for less than one year.

On the one hand, this rapid acquisition of English seems remarkable considering the fact that no one in the children's environment is overtly pushing the children to learn English. Elena and Carlos' parents, and Veronica's father, conceivably even discourage English in their efforts to reinforce Spanish. All three children have more contact with their Spanish speaking relatives than with their English speaking ones; and all of their caretakers - at home and at school - are native Spanish speakers who use Spanish with the children and support and encourage their developing knowledge of Spanish. The children are growing up in one of the most fully bilingual (or multilingual) cities in this nation. In many ways, then, the environment in which these children are developing can be considered Spanish dominant.

But in other important ways, the children's social context is decidedly English dominant. At each of the homes, the adults speak English to each other at least as often as they speak Spanish, although the patterns vary slightly from home to home. This may have contributed to

Carlos' idea that he would only speak English when he grows up, as well as to the appearance of the "voice of the other:" the children hear the significant adults in their lives using English in different ways, and the children may be appropriating that voice for themselves in their imaginative play. At each of the homes there was also a marked presence of English books, although the patterns of language use in relation to literacy events varied from home to home. Veronica certainly was almost never read to in Spanish, and all her favorite books were in English. Elena was read to in both, but at least as often in English as in Spanish, and some of the Spanish readings were translations. Carlos, on the other hand, was always read to in Spanish, but this was usually done in translation, a fact that was noticed - and not always appreciated - by the child. In addition, in all three homes, television programs and popular children's videos were viewed almost exclusively in English.

Similarly, while the pre-school setting appears on one level to be bilingual, in many important ways it is clearly English dominant. When both languages were used concurrently, English was always done first, and many times not translated. This is consistent with research that found much greater amounts of English than home language spoken in bilingual classrooms (Legarreta, 1977; Halcon, 1983; Tsang, 1983). The languages were also functionally distinguishable, as both languages were used in spoken discourse, but Spanish was often relegated to private interactions with Spanish speaking children, while English dominated in the public sphere (as in Group Time). The English speaking children tended to dominate the discussions (which could be a consequence of the language organization), and more children spoke English than Spanish at the school, despite the fairly even ratio of Spanish to English home environments, as the children from Spanish speaking homes tend to learn English, while the ones from English speaking homes do not learn Spanish. This, too, is consistent with Ramirez and Medino's (1990) finding that the amount of English and Spanish spoken by children in school is closely tied to the program model, with the least amount of Spanish spoken in models using concurrent translation.

Many more English books were available for the children to browse through, and many more English books were read by the teachers to the children. Similarly, almost all the posters on the walls were in English; only the hand-written ones were in Spanish. While it was not clear from the observations how these posters were used (if in fact they were read to the children or served as

teaching aids), at the very least, these posters convey a sense of the relative prestige of each language. Finally, the children's exposure to culture at the school cannot be considered bilingual and bicultural, given the fact that all the videos, and two major presentations viewed by the children, were done in English. This, however, is a reflection of the cultural dominance of English at a larger level, and especially the dominance of English in popular children's culture.

The teachers seemed genuinely unaware of the implications of this "bilingual" design, and seemed to feel that their plan was, in fact, truly bilingual (and consistent with a philosophy that calls for an emphasis on the minority language). At the same time, the teachers seemed to sense a need to justify the use of Spanish to the English speakers, as was evident from the extended discussion of the importance of speaking two languages, and the manner in which the head teacher handled the incident when the boys were being silly during "De Colores." It is at least possible that the boys' silliness had nothing to do with the fact that the song was in Spanish; perhaps they were simply bored. "De Colores" was the third or fourth song they had sung. Even if in fact their silliness was related to the language of the song, the teacher's defensive posture might actually have reinforced the notion that there was something wrong with using Spanish, that the use of Spanish is something that must be explained or defended. This pull of teachers toward the dominant language may reflect an internalization of societal norms.

Yet while it seems that the contradictions in the school's policy appear to have had an important role to play in the ascendency of English, it should be noted that all three sets of parents considered this school to be more bilingual/bicultural than other local pre-schools, given the genuine ethnic diversity in the student body, the fact that all the teachers are Latina, and the school's genuine commitment - albeit a contradictory one - to promoting the home cultures of the children.

The defensiveness that the teachers may have felt may be a symptom of a much bigger phenomenon. English is, without a doubt, the dominant language in this society, and it is the larger social context that is exerting the strongest pull on these young children, even as it may exert its pull on the teachers themselves. The power of the English language is symbolized by the power of the children's superheroes - English is the language of the strongest and most invincible creatures in these children's world.

Implications

The findings may be interpreted in two manners. They may be interpreted optimistically by those who worry about language minority children's acquisition of the dominant language: English is being acquired readily and easily by these three children, despite their parents' efforts to limit their exposure to the language. English is being acquired through exposure to popular culture, books, and some social interaction with English speakers; it is being explored and developed through social play, without sweat, struggle, or pain.

Alternatively, the findings may hint at something more ominous. The children's use of English for certain activities does not appear to be arbitrary, nor does it appear on an equal plane with the use of Spanish. The power of popular culture is evidenced by the fact that the children engaged in play related to popular characters on every observation session outside of the pre-school and on several within it. Yet that culture is only available to the children through the medium of the English language. Surely, then, there is bound to be a strong pull toward the appropriation of English, and conceivably, by default, away from Spanish.

The data from this study do not indicate any loss in the primary language of these three children. All three continue to use Spanish in most of their interactions, and appear to be progressing in their development in both languages. These children still use Spanish to express their own voice, the "voice of the self." English appears when they are pretending to be those "others" out there: other people, other adults, or other magical, mystical characters from the stories and movies that they love. Yet while the data do not suggest an immediate trend toward language loss, the power of English in these children's lives is evident, and Carlos' comments about speaking only one language when he grows up may be some indication of the struggle that lies ahead, if in fact these children are to develop into fully bilingual adults.

Pedagogical Implications

The implications of the research may also be considered on two levels. For those concerned with facilitating the process of English language acquisition in young children, the results of this study would suggest that English can be developed by exposing children to popular culture (a culture that can hardly be avoided in the United States) and by allowing the children to practice appropriating the voices of popular heroes through imaginative play. Through play-acting,

children may take risks that they might be less willing to do in their own persona (Rodriguez and White, 1983; Stern, 1983; Brice-Heath, 1992); the adoption of a separate identity might facilitate language learning (Lozanov, 1978) in part by lowering children's affective filters (Krashen, 1985).

The implications of this research for bilingual, biliterate development in young children is more complex. True bilingualism implies that a person is able to use both languages in a wide range of situations and for a diversity of topics. In order to achieve such a balance between the two languages, bilingual programs may have to work extremely hard to overcome the natural dominance of English in the larger society. This might be done by overcompensating with more of the minority language than English in spoken and written discourse, by encouraging the adults within a program to speak the minority language with each other as well as with the children (encouraging the adults to reflect self-consciously on their own uses of the languages, given that the marked status of the minority language may lead one to believe equal time is being given when in fact it is not), and by seeking out a diversity of resources that may help to resist the mon-cultural pull exerted by superhuman contextual forces.

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